

# A Timeline of Census History

Legend  
 Staff Population Geography Economy Technology and Innovation Research and Methodology

## Census Supervisors

**Thomas Jefferson**  
 (U.S. Secretary of State)  
 Under the leadership of the Secretary of State, U.S. Marshals conduct the nation's first census, which asks six questions.  
 New York is the nation's largest city with a population of 33,131.

**John Marshall**  
 (U.S. Secretary of State)  
 Temporary census headquarters moves from New York City, NY, to Washington, DC.

**Robert Smith**  
 (U.S. Secretary of State)  
 U.S. Marshals collect data on U.S. manufacturers while conducting the 1810 Census.

**John Quincy Adams**  
 (U.S. Secretary of State)  
 U.S. Marshals make the first agriculture inquiries by collecting data on families' "agricultural pursuits."

**Martin Van Buren**  
 (U.S. Secretary of State)  
 U.S. Marshals use uniform, printed schedules to collect census data. They do not collect manufacturing data due to its poor quality in 1810 and 1820.

**William Augustus Weaver (1840-1842)**  
 U.S. Marshals resume collection of manufacturing data, as well as data on mining and fisheries.  
 Congress establishes a census board to oversee data collection.

**Joseph C. G. Kennedy (1850-1853)**  
 The census records the names of all free persons in the household.

**J. D. B. DeBow (1853-1855)**  
 Superintendent J. D. B. DeBow publishes the first map in a census publication.  
 Six questionnaires collect population, slave, mortality, agriculture, manufacturing, and government data.

**Joseph C. G. Kennedy (1860-1865)**  
 The census enumerates American Indians not living on tribal lands in own racial category.

**Francis Amasa Walker (1870-1872)**  
 The census records the name of every person living in a household.  
 Census Office publishes the first annual Statistical Abstract.

**Francis Amasa Walker (1879-1881)**  
 Specially trained supervisors and enumerators replace U.S. Marshals to collect census data.

**Charles W. Seaton (1881-1885)**  
 Herman Hollerith's electric tabulator speeds tabulation of data.

**Robert Percival Porter (1889-1893)**  
 First use of administration records to collect data on the recorded indebtedness of private corporations and individuals.

**Carroll D. Wright (1893-1897)**

**Census Directors**

**William Rush Merriam (1899-1903)**  
 The U.S. Census Bureau becomes a permanent agency within the U.S. Department of the Interior. The next year it moves to the U.S. Department of Commerce and Labor.

**Simon Newton Dexter North (1903-1909)**  
 First inter-decennial census of manufacturing establishments

**Edward Dana Durand (1909-1913)**  
 Questions about "Mother-Tongue" and Civil War veteran status asked.

**William J. Harris (1913-1915)**  
 Census Bureau conducts "emergency censuses" of vital industries including steel, wool, leather, and explosives to support the war effort.

**Samuel Lyle Rogers (1915-1921)**  
 First time majority of U.S. population lives in urban areas.

**William Mott Steuart (1921-1933)**  
 Census of selected service industries conducted as part of the New Deal programs.

**William Lane Austin (1933-1941)**  
 The Census Bureau studies the use of statistical sampling and conducts a census of unemployment.

**James Clyde Capt (1941-1949)**  
 First use of statistical sampling during a decennial census.

**Roy Victor Peel (1950-1953)**  
 First enumeration of Americans abroad, including U.S. armed forces and federal civilian personnel.

**Robert Wilbur Burgess (1953-1961)**  
 The Data Processing Division opens in Jeffersonville, IN.

**Richard M. Scammon (1961-1965)**  
 Populations in urban areas receive questionnaires by mail before enumerator visits.

**A. Ross Eckler (1965-1969)**  
 Congress changes economic census years to those ending in "2" and "7".  
 Development of Dual Independent Map Encoding (DIME) to enable computerized geography

**George Hay Brown (1969-1973)**  
 Hispanic-origin asked of 5 percent of U.S. population.

**Vincent P. Barabba (1973-1976)**  
 All data products are available on magnetic computer tape.

**Manuel D. Plotkin (1977-1979)**  
 Introduction of the Survey of Women-Owned Businesses

**Vincent P. Barabba (1979-1981)**  
 Hispanic-origin asked of all households.

**Bruce Chapman (1981-1983)**  
 95 percent of U.S. households receive mailout/mailback questionnaires.

**John G. Keane (1984-1987)**

**Barbara Everitt Bryant (1989-1993)**  
 Topologically Integrated Geographic Encoding and Referencing (TIGER) system creates a digital geographic database of the nation.

**Martha Farnsworth Riche (1994-1998)**  
 First CD-ROMs containing census data released.  
 The North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) replaces the Standard Industrial Classification System.

**Kenneth Prewitt (1998-2001)**  
 Multiple responses to the race question permitted.  
 First use of a paid advertising campaign.

**Charles Louis Kincannon (2002-2008)**  
 The annual American Community Survey replaces the decennial census long form.

**Steve H. Murdock (2008-2009)**  
 Publication of first statistical atlas of the United States since 1920.

**Robert M. Groves (2009-2012)**  
 Single questionnaire asks 10 questions.

**John H. Thompson (2013-)**  
 The Census Bureau releases its first 5-year American Community Survey estimates.

**1790**  
**JANUARY 8, 1790** President George Washington gives the first State of the Union Address.  
**FEBRUARY 20, 1792** Establishment of U.S. Post Office Department  
**MARCH 14, 1794** Eli Whitney patents the cotton gin.  
**JULY 10, 1797** The United States launches its first naval ship, the frigate *USS United States*.

**1800**  
**APRIL 30, 1803** The United States purchases 828,000 square miles from France for the price of \$15 million.  
**MAY 14, 1804** Lewis and Clark Expedition begins.  
**1806** Noah Webster publishes the *Compendious Dictionary of the English Language*.  
**AUGUST 17, 1807** Robert Fulton makes the first steamboat journey up the Hudson River from New York City, NY, to Albany, NY.

**1810**  
**OCTOBER 11, 1811** Steam-powered ferry service between New York City, NY, and Hoboken, NJ, begins.  
**JUNE 18, 1812-FEBRUARY 18, 1815** War of 1812  
**SEPTEMBER 13-14, 1814** Francis Scott Key writes *The Star-Spangled Banner*.  
**APRIL 4, 1818** Congress adopts twenty stars and thirteen stripes configuration of the U.S. flag, with a star added for each new state.

**1820**  
**NOVEMBER 20, 1820** A whale sinks the whaling ship *Essex* inspiring Herman Melville's 1851 novel, *Moby Dick*.  
**DECEMBER 2, 1823** President James Monroe's "Monroe Doctrine" considers future European attempts to recolonize North America as hostile.  
**OCTOBER 26, 1825** The first boat leaves Buffalo, NY, en route to New York City, NY, via the Erie Canal.  
**FEBRUARY 28, 1827** The Baltimore & Ohio Railroad becomes the first to provide rail transportation for people and goods.

**1830**  
**MARCH 19, 1831** Edward Smith commits the first bank robbery in the United States when he steals \$245,000 from the City Bank of New York.  
**JULY 24, 1832** The first wagon train crosses the Rocky Mountains at Wyoming's South Pass.  
**FEBRUARY 23-MARCH 6, 1836** The Battle for the Alamo waged in San Antonio, TX.  
**FEBRUARY 11, 1839** University of Missouri in Columbia, MO, becomes the first college west of the Mississippi River.

**1840**  
**AUGUST 9, 1842** The Webster-Ashburton Treaty formalizes the U.S.-Canadian border east of the Rocky Mountains.  
**MAY 24, 1844** Samuel B. Morse sends the message, "What hath God wrought" over the first telegraph line from Washington, DC, to Baltimore, MD.  
**SEPTEMBER 1845** The "Great Potato Famine" begins, resulting in a surge of Irish immigration to the United States.  
**JANUARY 24, 1848** A worker discovers gold at Sutter's Mill in California.

**1850**  
**MARCH 20, 1852** Harriet Beecher Stowe publishes the anti-slavery masterpiece, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.  
**JULY 8, 1853** Commodore Matthew Perry lands in Edo Bay, Japan, and negotiates a trade agreement.  
**MARCH 23, 1857** Elisha Otis installs the first elevator in a building at 488 Broadway in New York City, NY.  
**OCTOBER 16, 1859** John Brown leads a raid on the armory at Harper's Ferry, VA (now WV).

**1860**  
**APRIL 3, 1860** The first Pony Express riders leave St. Joseph, MO, heading west and San Francisco, CA, heading east.  
**APRIL 12, 1861-MAY 9, 1865** U.S. Civil War  
**MARCH 30, 1867** The United States buys Alaska from Russia.  
**DECEMBER 10, 1869** Wyoming becomes the first state to give women the right to vote.

**1870**  
**MARCH 30, 1870** The 15th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution gives the right to vote to all men, regardless of race.  
**OCTOBER 8-10, 1871** A fire kills 300 people, destroys more than 3 square miles, and leaves 100,000 homeless in Chicago, IL.  
**MARCH 1, 1872** Yellowstone Park, which covers parts of Wyoming, Montana, and Idaho, becomes the first national park.  
**JUNE 25-26, 1872** Sioux and Cheyenne Indians defeat George Custer and the 7th U.S. Cavalry at the Battle of the Little Big Horn.

**1880**  
**JULY 4, 1881** Booker T. Washington opens the Tuskegee Institute (now Tuskegee University) in Tuskegee, AL.  
**SEPTEMBER 4, 1882** Thomas Edison's Pearl Street Station in New York City, NY, begins generating electricity for public use.  
**JUNE 17, 1885** The Statue of Liberty arrives in New York Harbor from France.  
**MAY 31, 1889** A flood in Johnstown, PA, kills more than 2,200 people after rain destroys the South Fork Dam.

**1890**  
**JANUARY 1, 1892** The Ellis Island Immigration Station in New York Harbor opens as the main immigration center on the east coast.  
**MAY 1-OCTOBER 30, 1893** More than 25 million people visit the World Columbian Exposition in Chicago, IL.  
**NOVEMBER 5, 1895** George B. Selden received the first U.S. patent for the automobile.  
**APRIL 25-AUGUST 12, 1898** The Spanish-American War

**1900**  
**SEPTEMBER 8, 1900** The deadliest natural disaster in U.S. history strikes Galveston, TX, when a hurricane kills 8,000.  
**DECEMBER 17, 1903** The Wright Brothers successfully fly a controlled, powered, and sustained heavier-than-air airplane at Kitty Hawk, NC.  
**APRIL 18, 1906** An earthquake kills 3,000 people and destroys 80 percent of San Francisco, CA.  
**OCTOBER 1, 1908** Ford Motor Company begins production of the Model T.

**1910**  
**APRIL 14-15, 1912** *RMS Titanic* strikes an iceberg and sinks in the North Atlantic Ocean.  
**AUGUST 15, 1914** The *SS Ancon* makes the first official transit of the Panama Canal.  
**APRIL 6, 1917-NOVEMBER 11, 1918** United States involvement in World War I.  
**JANUARY 16, 1919** Ratification of the 18th Amendment which prohibits the "manufacture, sale, or transportation of intoxicating liquors."

**1920**  
**AUGUST 18, 1920** Ratification of the 19th Amendment which gives women the right to vote.  
**FEBRUARY 14, 1924** IBM Corporation founded, in part from Herman Hollerith's Tabulating Machine Company.  
**MAY 21, 1927** Charles Lindbergh lands his airplane "Spirit of St. Louis" in Paris, successfully completing the first trans-Atlantic flight.  
**OCTOBER 29, 1929** Crash of the stock market signals the beginning of the Great Depression.

**1930**  
**MARCH 3, 1931** *The Star-Spangled Banner* designated as the national anthem.  
**DECEMBER 5, 1933** The 21st Amendment repeals the prohibition on the sale of alcohol.  
**MAY 6, 1937** The German airship *Hindenburg* bursts into flames over Lakehurst Naval Air Station, NJ.  
**JUNE 25, 1938** The Fair Labor Standards Act establishes a minimum wage, overtime pay, and regulates employment for minors.

**1940**  
**SEPTEMBER 28, 1941** Ted Williams is the last player to end the season with a .400 batting average.  
**DECEMBER 7, 1941-SEPTEMBER 2, 1945** United States involvement in World War II.  
**JANUARY 10, 1946** First meeting of the United Nations General Assembly.  
**OCTOBER 14, 1947** Chuck Yeager becomes the first man to break the sound barrier while flying the experimental Bell X-1 at Mach 1.

**1950**  
**JUNE 25, 1950-JULY 27, 1953** United States involvement in Korean War.  
**APRIL 15, 1955** Ray Kroc opens the first franchised McDonald's in Des Plaines, IL.  
**MAY 31, 1955** U.S. Supreme Court orders the integration of all public schools.  
**APRIL 9, 1959** NASA selects seven military pilots to be the first astronauts.

**1960**  
**AUGUST 13, 1961** The Berlin Wall isolates West Berlin from surrounding Communist-controlled East Germany.  
**OCTOBER 1, 1962** James H. Meredith becomes the first black student to attend the University of Mississippi.  
**FEBRUARY 9, 1964** The Beatles make their U.S. debut on "The Ed Sullivan Show."  
**JULY 20, 1969** Astronauts Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin are the first men to land on the moon.

**1970**  
**OCTOBER 1, 1970** Walt Disney World opens in Orlando, FL.  
**JUNE 9, 1973** Secretariat wins the first Triple Crown of horse racing since 1948.  
**APRIL 30, 1975** The last American combat personnel—10 U.S. Marines—depart Vietnam.  
**JULY 20, 1976** *Viking 1* space probe lands on Mars and sends back color photos of the surface.

**1980**  
**APRIL 12, 1980** The United States Olympic Committee votes to boycott the Summer Olympics in Moscow in response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.  
**AUGUST 12, 1981** IBM introduces the first personal computer, the IBM 5150.  
**JANUARY 28, 1986** The Space Shuttle *Challenger* explodes 74 seconds after liftoff.  
**NOVEMBER 9, 1989** East Germany opens the Berlin Wall, allowing its citizens to move freely between East and West Germany.

**1990**  
**AUGUST 1, 1990-FEBRUARY 28, 1991** U.S. participation in Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm.  
**DECEMBER 25, 1991** Dissolution of the Soviet Union.  
**APRIL 19, 1995** Domestic terrorists explode a bomb outside the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, OK, killing 168 people.  
**JULY 5, 1996** In Scotland, Dolly the sheep is the first cloned mammal.

**2000**  
**SEPTEMBER 11, 2001** Hijacked airliners crash into the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and a field in Shanksville, PA. In response, United States and allies invade Afghanistan.  
**OCTOBER 23, 2001** Apple Computer debuts a digital music device called the "iPod."  
**MARCH 19, 2003** The Iraq War begins.

**2010**  
**MAY 7, 2012** Nevada grants the first testing license for a driverless car.  
**FEBRUARY 2013** Scientists at Cornell University grow a living human ear using cow cells and a 3-D printer.  
**NOVEMBER 2, 2016** The Chicago Cubs win the World Series for the first time since 1908.